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MEXICO TODAY

By
REV. JOHN HOWLAND, D. D.
of GUADALAJARA

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A QUARTERLY

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W. E. S.

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★

Every land in which men have settled has something to recommend it, but Mexico has more than most. From the first discovery of America it awakened the cupidity of the Spaniard; and as soon as American and European capital began to seek for greater opportunities than could be found at home, attention was drawn to this southern republic, until foreign investments have now reached the colossal sum of about two billion dollars gold. It has been estimated that there is nowhere else in the world an equal area possessed of so great actual and potential riches.

The Country.

Climate is becoming ever a more influential factor in determining the course of travel and emigration. In this respect, Mexico has no rival. Although essentially a tropical country, its altitude, which averages about five thousand feet, combined with its position on both sides of the tropic of Cancer, and the fact that it lies in the zone of the monsoons that bring abundant summer rains, give to

most of the country a delightfully equable temperature of about seventy-two degrees. The rarity of the atmosphere and its general dryness make it not merely enjoyable and healthful, but also curative of some of the most distressing and fatal diseases that are common in lands of more variable climatic conditions.

The mineral wealth of Mexico seems to be practically inexhaustible. Old mines, worked for hundreds of years, yield more than ever, and new ones are being constantly opened. Silver is most abundant, Mexico furnishing about a third of all that is produced in the world. Gold, copper, lead, iron, oil, and, indeed, all desirable mineral products are stored in abundance through the great mountain ranges that follow the lines of the coasts.

The natural fertility of the soil is great and is automatically maintained by the immense growth of vegetation during the summer rains. The rubber trees and the guayule grows wild in sections of the country; coffee, pineapples, and all tropical fruits are either native or of easy cultivation. The standard products are corn and beans, but wheat is rapidly gaining ground as one of the staples, and rice is attracting attention as an economical food and a profitable crop. The large areas of what is now desert can be converted into fertile fields by means of storage dams and artesian wells.

The People.

The Mexican race, like most others, is a hybrid; but it is their pride that, instead of being the result of the convergence of many strains, as it true of some peoples,

and especially so of their neighbors to the north, they have but two; the Spanish and the aboriginal Indian. The ardent, restless, quick, imaginative, intrepid Spanish spirit, which offered and maintained an impassible barrier to the Moslem invasion that threatened to overwhelm Europe, which explored and conquered the Americas, and for a time ruled the greater part of the known world, was blended with those Indians who had developed a really wonderful degree of civilization on the table land of Mexico. The very puzzling divergence in the information given by writers on Mexico as to the classes of people and the relative numbers of each is to be explained, in part at least, by the difficulty of tracing the genealogy of the mass of the people and the fact that social and economic conditions produce effects that are easily confused with ethnological causes. Very nearly the whole population has Spanish family names and Christian names taken from the calendar of the saints canonized by Rome; nearly all speak the Spanish language and profess adherence to the Roman Catholic Church.

Speaking in general terms, there is, first, a relatively small class of wealthy and well educated people who are usually of fair skin, with dark eyes and hair. Probably these have a predominance of Spanish blood in their veins, though the difference between their complexion and that of the lower classes might be largely if not wholly explained by their very different habits of life. Secondly, there is a larger, but still relatively small class of those who are in very moderate circumstances and whose fea-

tures and complexion are more suggestive of the aborigi-nees. Then there comes the bulk of the population which is commonly called "Indian," though by no means all of them are of mixed descent. These usually have a more sunburnt complexion and less delicate features, occasionally with eyes that suggest those of the Japanese. These three groups mix freely, especially the second and third, and the distinction is more social than racial. Conditions vary widely in different sections, and in some parts there are very considerable numbers of Indians, largely if not wholly unmixed with other blood.

On the whole, Mexicans should be considered as a homogeneous people, and all love their country with an ardor and a jealousy that are little known among the more cold blooded and calculating Anglo-Saxons.

In the three centuries of the formative period of the Mexican nation, they were under the complete domination of Spain and the Romish hierarchy. The Church, the army and the aristocracy, as a triumvirate of common interests, worked together to exploit the masses; and each of these three elements was at its worst. Ignorance and false standards of thought; low or even wrong ideals of morals had been inculcated. The natural consequences were most deplorable; almost universal illiteracy; incapacity for appreciating the value of truth; self-control only as counselled by fear or hope of gain; and more than half the births out of wedlock.

The old feudal system was transplanted to Mexican soil with its attendant arrogance, contempt for the poor, indifference to their suffering, and reckless extravagance,

on the one hand; and on the other, lack of ambition or desire for knowledge, and a thriftless dependence on others that is the most hopeless form of bondage. Climatic and other conditions, demanding large outlay for

Near to Nature in Mexico

irrigation and for other elements of productive enterprise, combined with the ancient system to make more difficult emergence from the substrata.

The typical educated Mexican of today is polite, artistic, pleasure loving, fond of travel and reading. The small merchants, artisans and domestics are, usually, content with their moderate gains and anxious mainly for the education of their children. The laboring man, especially in the country, is patient of toil and privation, and has little aspiration for himself or his family. The lapse from this class produces the bandit, of whom there have always been many acting more or less openly according to the strength of the central government. Intemperance works havoc in all classes; lax morals break up families; gambling destroys thrift; the bull ring and the cock pit cultivate cruelty and indifference to suffering. Superstition always fosters credulity, while at the same time it foments a compensating unbelief. Hence we find, side by side with the crassest of religious conceptions among the adherents of Rome, that spiritualism and similar vagaries have quite a considerable following, and that a large proportion of the thinking men adopt positivism and cognate forms of incredulity.

Political Development.

Not only were the Puritan and the Pilgrim principles of individual liberty, duty and responsibility unknown in Latin America but they were antagonistic to all their training and experience. However, the example of the American colonies and later that of France acted as a spark to kindle into flame the smouldering resentment, and the hated yoke of Spain was thrown off in the early part of the nineteenth century. In the

necessary readjustment of all things, the Church and the military leaders prevailed over the blind instincts of the untrained masses; but, though possessing the power, they failed to produce a stable form of government while the nation was working out its intricate and difficult problems. However, the great Mexican statesman, Benito Jaurez, with his colaborers, established the reformed constitution that broke, for a long time, if not finally, the political power of the intriguing Church, and opened the way for the control of the country by men of liberal and advanced ideas.

Porfirio Diaz, during the thirty-four years of his rule, did much for the nation. He gave it comparative peace, which is the prerequisite of development. He labored for the education of the common people, which is the absolutely necessary condition for stability. He reorganized the finances and established the national credit on a firm basis. He devoted his attention especially to the development of the resources of the country; but in doing this he availed himself largely of foreign capital and direction, granting countless concessions and subsidies. This method, while producing quick results, introduced dangerous and difficult problems that have had much to do with subsequent disorders. He especially failed in preparing the nation for the day when the power should be taken from his hands. There was little public consciousness or loyalty to the government as distinct from individuals, and there was almost no experience in self-government.

When Mr. Madero came into power on the crest of

a tremendous wave of popular uprising against tyranny, he had a wonderful opportunity to gather about him the best elements and guide the nation into safer courses of stability and growth. Unfortunately, he proved himself pitiably incompetent in every way. His failure fanned into flame the resentments and selfish ambitions that were only partially in abeyance, and matters went from bad to worse until he was finally eliminated from the situation by his arrest and subsequent resignation. Gen. Huerta, the commander-in-chief of the army, was installed as provisional president with the especial responsibility of "cleaning up" the country, ridding it of the groups of malcontents and bandits that were terrorizing various sections of the country. All but two of the twenty-seven States formally recognized the new government at once, as did the European powers. A few days later, came the tragic death of Mr. Madero, and some, with this as a cause and others using it as a pretext; some from what they considered real patriotism, others from jealousy and spite; and still others for the simple love of plunder; united in fomenting disorder, and a counter revolution took definite shape.

It looked, for a time, as though the federal government would win; but the tide began to turn and the enemies of the central government became more united as they were increasingly successful. The "constitutionalists" doubtless believed that the future well-being of the country demanded the elimination of the *"cientificos,"* the group that "scientifically" managed affairs under Diaz by brilliant political and financial combinations; and

that they were championing the cause of the oppressed masses against the outrages and abuses of the aristocracy. The supporters of the federal government, on the other hand, held that a constitutional government was more likely to emanate from the one then existing, and that the socialistic procedures of the other party would bring increasing disorder and confusion instead of peace. Naturally, there was much of personal hatred and ambition and blind prejudice on both sides, but in the main, each party was trying to sustain what seemed to it best for the nation.

In addition to the original grants of territory and large concessions, there has been a gradual and quite general absorption of the lands of the small holders for the formation of immense estates. Much of this has been done with more or less evident injustice and this constitutes a very general cause of discontent. The restoration of lands that have been fraudulently taken and the offerings of small holdings to all who care for them, under easy conditions, would doubtless help to appease the social and political unrest, at least for a time.

Mission Work Needed.

The great fundamental principles of Christianity were unknown or grossly misunderstood and misapplied in Mexico under Spanish rule. Being a Christian, instead of implying a conscious and deliberate abandonment of confidence in one's self for the working out of atonement for the past, for the restoration of peace of conscience, and guidance and control in all activities,

was understood to be a mere matter of baptism. The foundations for a love of truth and intelligent faith were destroyed by such doctrines as that of transubstantiation, which teaches that in spite of the testimony of all of our God-given senses, to the contrary, we must believe under pain of eternal damnation that the consecrated wafer ceases to be composed of flour and becomes materially the flesh of the crucified Lord. Christ is presented either as the babe, incapable of understanding or meeting human need; or the inanimate Jesus nailed to the cross. The man Christ Jesus, as friend, counsellor, guide, model, and redeemer, is hardly known. Repentance is changed, even in the translations of the Scriptures, to simple penance. Ordinary sins are classed as "venial" and can be forgiven by such trivialities as beating the breast, and the repetition of certain formulæ. Forgiveness of "mortal" sins is to be obtained only through the Church, whose intercession can be secured by pay rather than by spiritual acts and conditions. The law of God is "made void by tradition." The second commandment is usually omitted, under the pretext that it is merely an explanatory clause of the first; and many fairly well educated people are amazed to learn that the use of images is forbidden in the Bible. The fourth commandment counted the third by them, is reduced to the form: "Thou shalt keep the feasts," making no mention of sanctity nor of any distinciton between the divinely ordained day of rest and the feasts instituted by the Church. Everything is reduced to a tariff. Nearly every difficulty can be compounded by the payment of

money. Souls of the dead are declared to be immediately freed from purgatory by masses paid for by raffles.

The religious life of the people consists mainly of occasional attendance at the unintelligible ceremony of the mass; repetition of a stated form of "confession" to a priest at least once a year (though many never go);

Festival before Cathedral, Guadalupe

and devotion to some saint. In the worship of saints, superstition runs into the most irrational and childish vagaries. Saints are propitiated by dances, orgies, lights, flowers, tinsel, gunpowder, and dynamite; if considered inattentive, their images are castigated by neglect, by

being turned face to the wall or shut in a box, or even by blows. There is a national "Virgin of Guadalupe," and countless virgins and Christs of many sizes, hues, and features, who are considered "miraculous" both in their origin and in their power to obtain relief for all human ills and for the granting of all desires. Priests are frequently immoral, bearing in form and feature the proof of excessive indulgence of appetites and passions; and they very commonly avail themselves of their position in order to accumulate relatively large fortunes.

At the time of the enactment of the "Reform Laws" under Preident Jaurez, one-third of all of the real estate of the country was in the hands of the Church. Those laws dispossessed it of all that it held and prohibited any Church from holding property in the future; but the Church of Rome in Mexico is considered to be again as wealthy as it was before, ways having been found to evade the restrictions. Rigid adherence to the truth, conscientious respect for the rights of property, and responsibility for one's own character and duty, as held by the founders of New England and transmitted by them to their posterity as their most valuable inheritance, are little known in Mexico. The standards are different and, from the evangelical standpoint, they seem pathetically and dangerously low. Graft among officials, deceit among merchants, and petty thieving by the poor, while not approved, have been so common that they have come to be accepted as a necessary part of the order of things.

In their appeal to conscience and reason for a just in-

terpretation of revealed truth, evangelical missions have to encounter bitter, alert and untiring opposition. Zeal to protect the souls under their charge against damnable heresy, jealousy of the impeachment of their absolute authority, and pain at the loss of the power of unlimited exploitation, have combined to induce the priesthood to inflame the passions of the people against those who "teach strange doctrines" and "turn the world upside down." It is difficult to secure buildings for services or schools or even houses for residence of the missionaries. Not merely believers, but those who come to listen or who are known to have Bibles or evangelical literature in their possession are subjected to eviction, loss of employment, of friendships, and of social standing; and often to physical violence and even death. One American and many Mexicans, whose number can not be even estimated, have died as martyrs to their faith in the Gospel. At first the persecution was more or less open and brutal, and it still is so in many smaller towns and country districts. Latterly, it is even more difficult to meet because, while keeping within the law, it avails itself of more complete organization and methods that are less repulsive but none the less effective.

Missions.

The American soldiers did something, during the invasion of Mexico in the forties, to introduce copies of the Scriptures into the country. The wakening of thought that followed the three years of war for religious liberty led to the formation of many little groups that devoted themselves to the study of the Roman Catholic versions

of the Bible. It was possible to direct some work in the northeastern part of the country before it was feasible formally to open missions. Christian laymen residing in the country sometimes exerted an influence that prepared the way for the rapid development of evangelical churches. Since 1872 mission work has been established by the principal denominations, and the greater part of the country has been explored and tentatively occupied in the principal centers of population. Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists North and South, and Baptists have their centers in the national capital; Congregationalists in Chihuahua and Guadalajara; Christians in Monterey, and Friends in Ciudad Victoria. Work has been undertaken by several smaller denominations and groups in various sections. All are indirectly much aided by the American Bible Society, which has its headquarters in Mexico City and maintains colporters in all the States of the Republic. The Bible has, for the Mexican, the charm of novelty; and it is not uncommon to find servants and working people carrying a Testament and devoting spare moments to its perusal with the eageress of an American youth for reading tales of adventure or crime.

The means found useful for the extension of the Gospel are still those used by the Master, namely: preaching, healing, private conversations, and the training and commissioning of others. Modern conditions have made it possible to add to these the school and the printing press.

Missionaries not unfrequently acquire a knowledge of Spanish that is more academically exact and complete than that of many of the Mexicans, and are accounted

acceptable preachers. The Mexican ear is, however, extremely sensitive to errors and defects in pronunciation and construction, and the Spanish-American imagination is so vivid and fertile that Anglo-Saxon preaching can never have the power and attractiveness of that of the native, especially for the cultured classes. Much has been accomplished in the preparation of native preachers, and the larger part of the churches are now supplied with pastors. The means however, have been very inadequate and the time elapsed since the beginning of this work is still too brief for the production of Mexican preachers sufficiently strong of character, wide and profound in scholarship, and ripe in experience to command national attention. The pressure is almost irresistible to push men, young in years or experience or both, directly into the work and under conditions little calculated to assure continued growth and development. Moreover, most of the preachers, up to the present, have had only limited evangelical training in childhood, both in the home and at school, and they are thus hampered in later life. Nearly all of the protestant churches are poor and even with the help of the mission boards can pay only a most meager salary in comparison with what a brilliant young man can earn in business. This fact has great influence in the choice of occupation, and often presents itself to the mind of the minister in his hours of despair over the serious financial problems that confront him, and it either sours his disposition and makes him permanently despondent and inefficient, or it sets him to studying medicine or shorthand and decides

him finally to abandon his calling. In spite of these difficulties, Mexico boasts a considerable group of earnest, able and successful pastors and evangelists; and improving conditions will make possible greater efficiency in this most important department.

Mexico has many able physicians, skillful surgeons, and municipal, religious and private hospitals; and it is customary for all doctors to give free consultations at certain hours every day. On the other hand, ignorance, prejudice, poverty, and vice cause appalling suffering, inefficiency and mortality. Free consultation usually means simply the giving of a prescription to be bought at a drug store which gives a percentage to the doctor, or which is owned by him. There is great need of preventive as well as curative work as a philanthropic enterprise; and, naturally, it gives an almost unmatched opportunity for the approach to Gospel teaching. Several missions are doing very successful work in this department; but, thus far, only a very few of the large centers of population enjoy the benefit of this kind of effort.

Many believe that personal evangelism, which must ever be the most effective method of propagation, has not received proper attention in Mexico. The foreign workers are always under heavy pressure in their special departments, and at best are not well fitted for doing this. Appropriations are lamentably deficient, so that the preparation and support of Bible readers, and what is even more serious, the proper teaching and training of the ministry in this line of work has been neglected. Some pastors and missionaries, however, and many consecrated mem-

bers of the churches have been very effective in this way.

Education comes largely through the printed page, and the Church has long recognized the value of the press as a means of awakening and moulding thought. Tracts, books and periodicals in Spanish have been produced with increasing rapidity and efficiency. It is natural, and yet to be deplored, that a very great proportion of this literature has been a more or less unsuccessful translation from English; thus losing, as must always be true, much of vivacity, clearness and force. Nevertheless, eternity alone can show the whole effectiveness of this bread upon the waters, and enough is known of its results to clearly demonstrate its importance. Several excellent religious weeklies are published and many other smaller papers are issued. The Tract Societies are rendering efficient aid by the publication of good books. In line with the spirit of co-operation for greater efficiency, that is at present so dominant a note in church activity, nearly all of the churches have combined in the preparation of Sunday School literature, and attempts are being made to secure a consolidation of the principal periodicals.

Education.

The education of girls had been more neglected in Mexico than that of boys, and then too, the mother is usually the determining factor in the character of the home and of the coming generation; moreover, the instruction of children is most frequently under the care of females. Therefore schools for the education and training of girls were among the first to be undertaken,

and several of these have won an important place for themselves and for the evangelical cause. Spanish customs and traditions guard the female very strictly, while granting much greater liberty to the other sex. Partly on this account, it has proved more difficult to attain as great success in mission schools for boys, but several have made an excellent record and are full of promise for the future. With the desire of co-operating rather than competing with the government system, most of the mis-

The Cathedral, Mexico City

sions have not attempted to do much with village schools; but experience is convincing many that this line of work offers especial advantages that it would seem unwise to neglect. While it is true that the government is making determined efforts to perfect its educational system, the

difficulties are so many that work still has many deficiencies, as viewed from the evangelical standpoint. Aside from their pedagogical defects, the official schools are intended to be strictly non-religious; but, as a matter of fact, in most of the smaller places, the convictions of the teachers and the popular sentiment among pupils and patrons is such as to make it almost impossible for the children of protestant families to attend. Moreover, the person who directs an evangelical village school can, usually, look after the local church. This effects a decided economy, and at the same time avoids what experience has shown to be a very positive and serious danger, namely, that a preacher with limited training and experience, when placed in charge of an isolated church, frequently loses his energy and devotion to study and becomes increasingly inefficient. School work, on the contrary, cultivates habits of regularity, stimulates to study, and maintains an intimate and intelligent touch with the life of the community.

The Methodists North have erected what is probably the finest school edifice in the country, for their college and seminary in Puebla. This institution has a Mexican president, who seems to be eminently successful. The same mission has a large boarding school for boys in Queretaro, with only Mexicans in charge; it also has large schools for girls in Mexico City, Puebla and Pachuca. This church has done more than any other for education, maintaining about seventy schools, with an enrolment of approximately five thousand pupils. The Methodist church South has a coeducational institution in

Chihuahua which appears to be the largest in the country, having attained an enrolment of over seven hundred. It has also large girls' schools in the national capital, in Guadalajara, San Luis Potosi, Durango and Saltillo. The Presbyterians have their college and seminary in Coyoacan, a suburb of the capital, with a large girls' school near by in San Angel, and others in Saltillo, and Aguascalientes. The principal Congregational schools are: *"Colegio Chihuahuense,"* in Chihuahua, a normal school for girls with lower grades for both sexes; *"El Progreso"* a mixed school in Parral; and in Guadalajara *"Instituto Corona"* for the higher education of girls with mixed lower grades, and *"Colegio Internacional,"* giving normal, commercial and theological training to young men. There is a call for the reopening of their school in Hermosillo, and it will be a mistake if the opportunity is lost.

Results.

The numerical and obvious results of more than forty years of effort are not all that could be desired. Scattered among the fifteen millions of the population, there are about thirty-five thousand Mexican members of the evangelical churches. Aside from the minors in protestant families, there are many who are in sympathy with the churches, but who have not become members for very varied reasons. Some have never reached a definite decision to accept the truth in the face of all they will be called upon to suffer. Others have marital entanglements which can not be arranged, as Mexican law allows no

divorce, but only separation without the rights of remarriage. Still others have not yet obtained moral strength sufficient entirely to break away from life-long vices. It is generally admitted that there are at least one hundred and fifty thousand protestants in the country.

The indirect results are far greater. While it is true that the attraction of novelty has been lost, it is also a fact that most of the ignorant fear and misinformation has largely disappeared. In the earlier days, crowds would gather around an inn to see if the missionary, who was supposed to be a foreign devil, really had horns, hoofs and a caudal appendage, as many believed he had. A riot was once started in the second city of the country when a missionary hired a small boy to carry some purchases from the market, because the cry was raised that he was kidnapping another child to use his blood in the manufacture of patent medicines. While services were held in obscure private buildings, it was easy for the priests to delude the people as to the features and purpose of the exercises; but the construction of attractive edifices in central points with everything open to the public, has shown the real character of evangelical work. Formerly, no seats, or only a very few, were to be found in the Romish churches. Now, nearly all are seated, as in the United States. Sermons were rare, being confined to especial days of the church year, or as paid for by some one devoted to some particular saint. Now sermons are common, almost universal, and they are frequently more instructive and helpful than former-

ly. Evangelical methods have been copied, schools opened by protestants have been duplicated, and the evangelical code of morals has been approved. Protestantism is succeeding in winning a place of respect and the recognition of its right to stand side by side with Rome in its appeal to the people. The products of our schools are appreciated as teachers and employees, and are acting as an effective leaven in many places.

The Outlook.

It is impossible to see what will be the outcome of the present situation. The Gospel has obtained a sufficiently strong footing to maintain itself unaided for a considerable time at least; but evangelical missions have too large spiritual and material interests in Mexico even to think of abandoning them. Some way will surely be found to prosecute the work more vigorously than ever. Plans are being carefully worked out by correspondence and conference for more effective co-operation and more aggressive effort in every line. Whatever be the outcome of the political troubles of the country, the people are certain to be more open to approach and more eager for education, as soon as peace is restored. It is commonly recognized that "democracy is in the saddle," and that the tyranny of military leaders, of a hierarchy, or of shrewd combinations of capital can not again hope for undisputed control. The hope of the country is in a broad, comprehensive, Christian education, and the attainment of this will be slow and uncertain without the efficient help of those who have had long experience in

this kind of training. Good government, social order and economic progress cannot be handed over ready made; all that can be done is to furnish the elements and aid the recipient to assimilate them. The United States, as the nearest neighbor, has the great opportunity and responsibility for doing this work for Mexico.

Many have long felt that the greatest and best effort in the way of helping our neighbor would be the founding, equipping and endowing a great university, that should be unsectarian but markedly Christian, and which should employ the best pedagogical methods as elaborated in evangelical countries, but wisely adapting them to the genius of the Latin-American temperament and traditions.

Battleships can only batter down the walls of a port, incidentally destroying some hundreds of lives. The cost of one of these instruments of destruction and death would found an institution which would give intellectual and spiritual life to thousands and would rapidly transform the country; and instead of going to the "scrap heap" in a few years, it would itself grow and develop and multiply itself without limit. Millions of dollars of American gold have gone into Mexican delusions and frauds in the shape of the exploitation of mines, timber, rubber, and coffee. Some investments have been richly productive; but the best of all, the investment of money and effort in life and for eternity has hardly been seriously tried.

Who will be "neighbor" to this nation that has fallen into the hands of those who have stripped it, and wounded it, and left it half dead?

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